



GRAY'S MELANOPS.

J. Gould sculp. 1858. Richter del. et lit.

Hallman del. & Walton. Eng.

GRAUCALUS MELANOPS.

Black-faced Graucalus.

Corvus melanops, Lath. Ind. Orn. Supp., p. xxiv. no. 1.

Ceblepyris melanops, Temm. Man., p. lxii.

Rollier à masque noir, Le Vaill. Ois. de Parad., pl. 30.

Black-faced Crow, Lath. Gen. Syn. Supp., vol. ii. p. 116.—Ib. Gen. Hist., vol. iii. p. 46.

Graucalus melanops, Vig. and Horsf. in Linn. Trans., vol. xv. p. 216.—Gould in Syn. Birds of Australia, Part IV.

Kai-a-lora, Aborigines of New South Wales.

Nu-lâr-go, Aborigines of the lowland, and

Nû-laarg, Aborigines of the mountain districts of Western Australia.

Blue Pigeon of the Colonists.

NEW SOUTH WALES, Van Diemen's Land, Swan River and Port Essington are each inhabited by *Graucali* so nearly allied to the present bird, that by many persons it would be considered questionable whether they were not referable to one and the same species; but as this is by no means certain, I shall confine my remarks to the bird inhabiting New South Wales, which is one of the largest of the genus yet discovered, and distinguished from its near allies by the greater depth of the blue-grey colouring of the upper surface.

The *Graucalus melanops*, then, is a very common bird in New South Wales, but is far less numerous in winter than in summer, when it is so generally dispersed over the colony, that to particularize situations in which it may be found is quite unnecessary; hills of moderate elevation, flats and plains thinly covered with large trees being alike resorted to; but I do not recollect encountering it in the midst of the thick brushes,—situations which, probably, are uncongenial to its habits and mode of life. On the plains of the interior, such as the Liverpool and those which stretch away to the northward and eastward of New South Wales, it is more abundant than within the colony.

Its flight is undulating and powerful, but is seldom exerted for any other purpose than that of conveying it from one part of the forest to another, or to sally forth in pursuit of an insect which may pass within range of its vision while perched upon some dead branch of a high tree, a habit common to this bird and the other members of the genus. On this elevated perch it sometimes remains for hours together; but during the heat of the day seeks shelter from the rays of the sun by shrouding itself amidst the dense foliage of the trees. Its food consists of insects and their larvæ, and berries, but the former appear to be preferred, all kinds being acceptable, from the large Mantis figured in the accompanying Plate, to others of a minute size. One of the specimens I procured was shot while in the act of flying off with the insect figured.

As much diversity occurs in the colouring of the face and throat of this species before it arrives at maturity, I made a point of minutely investigating the subject during my stay in New South Wales, and the following is the result of my observations. When the young, which are generally two in number, leave the nest, the feathers of the body are brown, margined with light grey; this colouring is soon exchanged for one of a uniform grey, except on the lower part of the abdomen and under tail-coverts, which are white, and a mark of black which surrounds the eye and spreads over the ears: the throat and forehead in this stage are lighter than the remainder of the plumage, which is somewhat singular, as in the next change that takes place those parts become of a jet-black; and this colour, I believe, is never afterwards thrown off, but remains a characteristic of the adult state of both sexes, which are at all times so similar in size and colour as not to be distinguished from each other.

It breeds in October and the three following months. The nest is often of a triangular form, in consequence of its being made to fit the angle of the fork of the horizontal branch in which it is placed; it is entirely composed of small dead twigs, firmly matted together with a very fine, white, downy substance like cobwebs and a species of *Lichen*, giving the nest the same appearance as the branch upon which it is placed, and rendering it most difficult of detection. In some instances I have found the nest ornamented with the broad, white, mouse-eared Lichen; it is extremely shallow in form, its depth and breadth depending entirely upon that of the fork in which it is built; the largest I have seen did not exceed six inches in diameter.

The ground-colour of the eggs, which are almost invariably two in number, varies from wood-brown to asparagus-green, the blotches and spots, which are very generally dispersed over their surface, varying from dull chestnut-brown to light yellowish brown; in some instances they are also sparingly dotted with deep umber-brown; their medium length is thirteen lines, and breadth ten lines.

Its note, which is seldom uttered, is a peculiar single purring or jarring sound, repeated several times in succession.

The adults have the forehead, sides of the face, ear-coverts and throat jet-black; crown of the head, all the upper surface and wing-coverts delicate grey; primaries black, their outer edges and tips margined with grey; secondaries grey, with their inner webs black; tail grey at the base, gradually passing into black near the extremity, and broadly tipped with white; chest blackish grey, into which the black of the throat gradually passes; lower part of the abdomen pale grey; under tail-coverts white; irides, bill and feet black.

The Plate represents an adult male and a young bird of the first year of the natural size.